

## Istook Rejects Bill to Reduce OK Highway Funds

*Washington, D.C.* – Congressman Ernest Istook (R-OK) today voted against a bill which will significantly reduce Oklahoma’s share of highway funds over the next six years.

**“For years, we’ve been fighting to reverse Oklahoma’s donor state status,”** said Istook. **“Instead of helping, this bill will cause Oklahoma to slide backwards in its donor state status, becoming more of a donor state than we already are.”**

This is the second major transportation bill before Congress this year. The first, from Congressman Istook’s own Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee, became law in January and provided enough extra funds to enable Oklahoma to avoid donor state status this year.

This bill, however, comes from the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, which creates the multi-year framework and formulas for funding. (The only Oklahoman on that committee is Rep. Brad Carson.)

The problems with this bill include:

- Under the formula set in TEA-LU, Oklahoma will receive \$2.8 billion over the next six years—which is about \$250-million **less** than it would have under the current formula;
- It increases the percentage of gas taxes diverted to purposes other than building and maintaining roads and bridges.

In addition to setting the formula, TEA-LU also includes \$122 million in special projects in Oklahoma including \$34 million for the Crosstown Expressway and \$1 million for the Broadway Extension requested by Istook. (The amount for the Crosstown Expressway had been \$13 million in the original version, but was increased to \$34 million by an amendment on the House floor.)

**“It’s one step forward and two steps back,”** said Istook. **“I worked to make sure the bill funds important projects for my district, like \$34 million for the Crosstown Expressway. But I also worked toward fair treatment for all of Oklahoma. In the long run, however, this bill hurts us more than it helps us by changing the formula and costing Oklahoma hundreds of millions over the next six years.”**

In addition to his concerns about Oklahoma’s share of transportation dollars, Istook also voiced other concerns about the bill, **“First, the bill continues robbing the Highway Trust Fund to pay for things other than roads. We need to find better ways to fund transit and rail, rather than giving them one-sixth of fuel taxes paid by drivers. That huge diversion is why we can’t reduce the backlog of highway needs. Second, we should stop taking another 10% of the road money and using it for so-called ‘transportation enhancements’. Finally, we also need to make road-building less expensive, by restoring common-sense to the environmental regulations that create cost and delay, and by letting the free market determine wages on projects, rather than requiring union-scale.”**

Today’s authorization bill (named the Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (TEA-LU)) passed the House by a vote of 357-65.